

Senior Outreach

Section I: Understanding Why Seniors Are a Critical Audience

Seniors reflect the diversity of America—age, income, race, ethnicity, and lifestyle. It’s important, however, to recognize that this label refers to a group whose ages span more than 30 years. “The Silent Generation,” the oldest members of the group, was born between 1925 and 1945. Many of the younger seniors, commonly known as Baby Boomers, were born between 1946 and 1964. Both groups are eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), but in terms of experiences and outlook, they’re generations apart, and therefore need to be approached in different ways.

It’s fair to say that many seniors expected their “golden years” to be just that... golden. But the retirement years have not been trouble-free for all—some simply can’t make ends meet. Millions of seniors are living in poverty or are facing financial hardship because of high medical costs and rising living expenses. Silently suffering, too many of America’s oldest citizens are making tough choices—not taking their medications as prescribed, not adjusting the thermostat for heating or cooling, or skipping meals. While hunger in itself is a serious problem, not eating healthy meals often makes existing health conditions worse. The benefits offered by SNAP can help put food on the table and provide seniors with extra dollars to purchase fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat milk products.

What Does This Chapter Hope To Accomplish?

This toolkit section is designed to help address the rising rate of food insecurity among seniors, whom SNAP defines as 60 and older. Our goal is to put a “face” on people who are either coping with hunger over the long term or confronting it for the first time. While many are already enrolled in SNAP, millions are eligible, but have not applied. This section will help you reach both senior generations by:

- Providing a clearer picture of individuals 60 and older, particularly those who could be helped most by SNAP.
- Discussing some of the barriers and myths that prevent seniors from enrolling in SNAP and keep them from putting healthy foods on the table.
- Highlighting ideas to help you reach people who are often overlooked: seniors with disabilities, those raising grandchildren or serving as guardians for other minors, and, finally, seniors who live in rural areas.
- Introducing quick tips and techniques for easily reaching seniors through the community and the media, and by sharing lessons learned from workers in the field.

Differences Among Seniors

Because of the large spread in age between these two “Senior Generations,” we need to account for differences in their circumstances and approach them through a variety of strategies. Let’s examine three areas:

Education

Before 1970, only one-third of Caucasians and fewer than 10 percent of African-Americans were high school graduates. Over the past 30 years, the percentage of older Americans with high school diplomas skyrocketed. However, the number of Hispanic and Asian seniors with high school diplomas remains



Differences Among Seniors

- Education
- Immigration
- Employment and Technology

low—making it highly probable that they have difficulty speaking or reading comfortably in English. Baby Boomers, on the other hand, are typically well educated.

Immigration

Our Nation has experienced a cultural shift. Hispanics are not simply the largest minority group, but are also the fastest growing. There are key differences, however, between individuals who migrated to America decades ago and more recent arrivals. Members of the Silent Generation typically speak English at home and at work, and more than likely have changed some of their behaviors to fit in. They are generally more comfortable interacting with government agencies and organizations, both inside and outside their community. In contrast, recent immigrants, even when documented, may hesitate to seek services from government agencies. They tend to hold officials in high regard or with suspicion, in turn suppressing their own views. Seniors from other minority backgrounds may function in similar ways. Visit the [Cultural Competency](#) chapter of this toolkit to learn more about outreach to minority audiences.

Employment and Technology

Baby Boomers, especially those born in the 1950s and early 1960s, are most likely still employed and have used technology at their place of business or at home. ATMs, debit cards, automated phone systems, and online banking are familiar. On the other hand, individuals 75 and older may have retired before technology, specifically the Internet, became part of everyday life. These seniors may feel more comfortable getting information through personal contacts, 1-800 numbers, large-print and easy-to-read fact sheets, and other more traditional media channels, such as the nightly news. Seniors who are disabled or who have health issues may need one-on-one assistance from an outreach worker. When possible, offer multiple ways for interested individuals to contact you.

General Outreach Strategies

There are some basic outreach strategies that cut across all audiences. The following are a few guidelines that will be described in more detail, as they relate to low-income seniors, as you go through this chapter:

1. **Know and understand** your [audience](#).
2. **Develop messages** that are simple and that speak to your audience.
3. **Identify and develop partnerships** with organizations that are like-minded.
4. **Distribute information** through partners, media, and events.
5. **Be mindful** of cultural and gender differences.
6. **Use your local resources**, such as phone numbers and/or Web sites of State and local SNAP offices. Check with your local SNAP office before your outreach to make sure it can handle an increase in requests.
7. **Be mindful** of predatory behaviors and distinguish yourself from these.
8. **Build trust and deliver** what you offer with a high level of customer service.



Tips & Tools

As outreach workers, you must understand the literacy level of your audience before asking them to read and interpret brochures and applications.

Getting To Know Your Audience

In getting to know your audience, it's important to first assess where there are differences as well as similarities. Following is a snapshot that compares all seniors with low-income seniors. First, let's discuss what they have in common.

Knowing where a majority of your target audience lives is vital to successful outreach. A majority of older adults live in metropolitan areas. *Of those eligible for SNAP, 70 percent do.* In addition, women outnumber men, and the ratio is highest among adults 80 and older. Finally, seniors in minority groups are more likely to be poor but almost 70 percent of seniors eligible for SNAP are white.¹ These are all important facts to consider as you determine where to spend your resources.

Other considerations are those things that make low-income seniors different from their more financially stable counterparts. See the following table for more details.

Differences Between Seniors Overall and Low-Income Seniors

All Seniors	Low-Income Seniors
Among all seniors, 64 percent live with relatives. ²	Almost 90 percent of poor older adults—87 percent of households with elderly that are eligible for SNAP benefits—live alone or with one other older adult. ³
More than half of all seniors live in nine States (California, Florida, New York, Texas, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, and New Jersey). ⁴	More than half of all seniors eligible for SNAP live in 10 States (New York, Texas, Florida, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, and Georgia). <i>California is not included because seniors who receive SSI also receive a standardized amount of cash for food assistance and are not eligible for SNAP benefits.</i> Further, one-quarter of all seniors who are eligible for SNAP live in the Southeastern part of the U.S. The Northeast region has the next highest concentration of poor seniors. ⁵
Persons over age 80 are a large group in the general population, but many live in institutional housing where they are not eligible for SNAP benefits. ⁶	By age groups, 40 percent of poor seniors are in their 60s, about 30 percent are in the 70s, and the other 30 percent are 80 and older. ⁷

1. Leftin, J. & Cunyningham, K. *Profiles of Elderly Persons Eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.*
2. U.S. Census Bureau Newsroom. Facts for Feature: Older Americans Month, May 2008, ONLINE. 2008. U.S. Census Bureau. Available: http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/cb10-ff06.html [25 Aug. 2009]
3. Leftin, J. & Cunyningham, K. *Profiles of Elderly Persons Eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.*
4. Administration on Aging. A Profile of Older Americans: 2008, ONLINE 2009. U.S. Bureau of Census. Available: http://www.aoa.gov/AoARoot/Aging_Statistics/Profile/2008/8.aspx [25 Aug. 2009]
5. Leftin, J. & Wolkwitz, K. *Trends in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates: 2000 to 2007.*
6. Leftin, J. & Cunyningham, K. *Profiles of Elderly Persons Eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.*
7. Leftin, J. & Cunyningham, K. *Profiles of Elderly Persons Eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.*

A Few More Facts About Seniors: Which Seniors Are Most at Risk?

Food insecurity remains a problem that cuts across race, gender, age, and geography. Over 5 million seniors—11.4 percent of all seniors—experienced some form of food insecurity (i.e., were marginally food insecure).⁸ Recently, the Meals on Wheels Association of America funded a study to look at seniors and hunger entitled “The Causes, Consequences, and Future of Senior Hunger in America.” The study found that those seniors at higher risk for food insecurity tend to be:

- **Low-income.** Seniors living at or below the poverty line.
- **Younger seniors.** Individuals under the age of 70 are at higher risk for hunger than their older peers.
- **Minority.** African-Americans and Hispanics/Latinos.
- **Raising a grandchild.** One in five seniors who are living with a grandchild has an increased risk for hunger. This is often because families in these households are already struggling with fewer resources.
- **Less educated.** Individuals without a high school diploma.
- **Living alone.** Are divorced, separated, widowed, or never married.
- **Disabled or requiring support for basic activities.**
- **Renters.** Often face rent increases while living on fixed incomes.
- **Living in the South.** While food insecurity and poverty occur in every State, household incomes in the South continue to lag behind other parts of the country. Seniors living in Mississippi, South Carolina, and Arkansas are at even higher risk of hunger.

A Community Needs Assessment Can Help You Reach Seniors

While it is important to be mindful of the above information about senior audiences, sometimes the only way you can really know and understand the seniors you are trying to reach is to do a [community needs assessment](#).

Meeting with others who serve older adults will give you a clearer and more accurate picture of your target audience and what is being done in your community. For example, you will learn what each organization is doing, how your program might fit in, what resources (funds, volunteers, facilities, Web sites, etc.) are available, what can be done to remove barriers to SNAP participation, and how you can work together to minimize duplication of efforts and better use limited resources.

8. Ziliak, J.P.; Gundersen, C.; Haist, M. The Causes, Consequences, and Future of Senior Hunger in America. Web site: <http://216.235.203.153/Document.Doc?id=13>



Tips & Tools

The [Cultural Competency section](#) of the toolkit provides a step-by-step guide for conducting a community needs assessment.

Networking with other service groups will also:

- Help you identify new partners. For example, you might establish or strengthen relationships with local SNAP offices, State Units on Aging, the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, senior centers or other groups, especially those that receive SNAP funding under the optional State outreach and/or nutrition education plans.
- Help you define and understand your target audience, as well as identify areas of low participation.
- Identify gaps between services and needs and strategies for addressing them.
- Provide opportunities to combine or offer one-stop shopping services. Your organization can team up with other programs to offer a “package” of benefits, rather than marketing each of them separately. For example, low-income seniors who are enrolled in Medicare can qualify for substantial benefits through two other important programs: the Medicare Part D Low-Income Subsidy (LIS) and Medicare Savings Programs (MSPs), which are State Medicaid programs that help with drug costs and cover out-of-pocket health costs that Medicare does not cover. SNAP, LIS, and MSPs have very similar eligibility rules, but all suffer from low participation rates among low-income seniors who are not connected to other benefits.
- Provide opportunities for cross-training of employees. For example, SNAP offices could learn more about your organization and what services you provide. Your employees would learn more about SNAP requirements and [policy](#). Understanding roles and responsibilities may lead to ideas on how to implement new business practices. It also ensures that accurate information is being provided to seniors who may have misinformation about the Program.
- Show where technology could help extend the reach of services, such as creating links to relevant Web sites.
- Reveal tried-and-true suggestions that worked with other programs, for example, demonstration projects such as Combined Application Projects (CAPs). These projects are a creative partnership among the Social Security Administration (SSA), State agencies, and the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to simplify the SNAP application process for recipients of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) who live alone. Under the CAP demonstration, one-person SSI households can file a shortened SNAP application form without having a face-to-face interview at the SNAP office. Data collected from the SSA interview are electronically transferred to the SNAP office for processing.
- Help set goals and measure success (what worked, didn’t work, and lessons learned).



Did You Know?

The Social Security Administration (SSA) and State Medicaid agencies have a new process in which SSA forwards LIS applications to States for MSP (Medicare Secondary Payer) eligibility determinations. State agencies can increase the value of this effort by connecting seniors to the full range of public benefits for which they qualify. In almost every State, the MSP program is administered by the same agency (indeed, often by the same State worker) as SNAP, so it would be highly efficient to use the new process as a tool for signing up eligible Medicare beneficiaries for SNAP.⁹

The Right Mix for Reaching Seniors

Clearly, there is a lot of diversity within the two generations of seniors. Here are some creative ideas for reaching them.

Five Fresh Ideas for Reaching Members of the Silent Generation

1. **Present a True Picture.** Avoid portraying all older seniors as frail or inactive. A new study of seniors 70+ found that, on average, they feel 13 years younger than their actual age. Focus on the benefits of getting older, not the limitations.
2. **Mix It Up.** Since women typically outlive men, show mixed groups of friends, not just couples, in materials. Include pictures with grandchildren.
3. **Serve Those Who Served Their Country.** The majority of men of this generation served in the military. Thousands of women also served as nurses or volunteered with organizations like the American Red Cross and the United Service Organization (USO). Make outreach to veterans' groups, homes, and hospitals part of your strategy.
4. **Go Along for the Ride.** Partner with transportation services that take seniors on errands or to appointments; have materials on hand that include the myths and facts about SNAP benefits.
5. **Throw a Great Party.** Host social events where people mix and mingle. Make it fun by having activities, games, food, and entertainment, and provide information about SNAP. Putting SNAP information in a game format like BINGO, crossword puzzles, or even a "true/false" quiz is fun and helps get your message across in a memorable way.

Five Fresh Ideas for Reaching Baby Boomers

1. **Keep It Short. Keep It Simple.** Boomers also find themselves as "card carrying" members of the sandwich generation—providing for older adult parents while taking care of children at home. Place information in venues that they normally visit, like the grocery store or pharmacy waiting area. They might not be eligible but may know of someone who is.
2. **Showcase Diversity.** Immigrants represent 17 percent of all Baby Boomers. Connect with communities and organizations that serve immigrant and non-English-speaking households.
3. **Go Online.** Nearly three-fourths of Baby Boomers go online at least once a month. Tap into sites like AARP Foundation's online community or senior-oriented social networking sites.
4. **Forget Labels.** Boomers view themselves as young and vibrant and typically won't respond to anything aimed at "seniors." Resist using this label and other age-related expressions, like "golden years."
5. **Remember the Workplace.** Many are still actively involved in their careers or have returned to the workplace as part-timers. Human Resources directors are generally willing to provide helpful information to employees.



Tips & Tools

Invite staff from your local SNAP office to attend and help with prescreenings, filling out application forms, and/or scheduling appointments.

Outreach workers or volunteers who will be completing SNAP application forms should be trained in how to fill out the form. If applicants submit applications that are not filled out correctly, it not only creates problems for the customers but also for the local SNAP offices. In addition, it can undermine the trust and relationship between the customer and the outreach worker or organization.



Recipe for Success

"Seniors are harder to reach because they are more isolated, often live alone, and don't have anyone to help them navigate the SNAP enrollment process. They are also more mistrustful of giving out personal information and are potentially too proud to ask for government assistance."

Celia Hagert, Senior Policy Analyst, Center for Public Policy Priorities

The Right Mix for Reaching Seniors

Five Fresh Ideas for Reaching Seniors With Disabilities

1. **Join Others.** Form partnerships and provide materials to local groups that serve disabled communities, including individuals with low vision (Lighthouse International), limited hearing (Hearing Loss Association of America), and mobility (Easter Seals). Don't forget that help is a two-way street. It is important to recruit volunteer outreach workers from these agencies as well.
2. **Get Buy-In From Retailers.** Ask grocery stores, and stores that sell medical equipment and supplies (such as wheelchairs and walkers), if they will put up posters and provide sample SNAP promotional materials.
3. **Seek Aid From Nurses.** Meet with rehabilitation facilities, dialysis centers, and local chapters of the Visiting Nurses' Association or Meals on Wheels groups to reach seniors who are recently disabled and may be considering support services for the first time.
4. **Be Part of a Road Show.** Make a list of health-related support groups aimed at seniors, such as those focusing on diabetes, arthritis, low vision, prostate or breast cancer, and stroke—and offer to make mini-presentations about SNAP and its benefits.
5. **Consider Furry Friends.** According to Meals on Wheels, about 60 percent of seniors who receive their services live with pets. Target organizations and veterinarians that provide discounted services for seniors, such as the Humane Society.



Tips & Tools

Volunteer to host a “meet and greet” event with organizations serving seniors in your community. A good place to start is with the local Area Agency on Aging to see what services are provided and how your agency might fit in.

Your local SNAP office is also an important partner and may attend. Also, your SNAP office might be able to direct you to other agencies in your community.

As part of your planning, take time to review the [Administration on Aging's](#) policies that guide outreach programs aimed at seniors. These guidelines cover nutrition services, home-delivered meals, guidelines for paying volunteers, and organizing community service programs.



Recipe for Success

“We partner with about 480 agencies. That’s the secret for our food bank...people go into other agencies because they don’t have enough rent money, utilities, or they have a legal problem...”

Sandy Hinojos, Community Food Bank, Tucson, AZ

The Right Mix for Reaching Seniors

Five Fresh Ideas for Reaching Seniors Who Are Guardians

1. **Take It Back to School.** If you live in one of the areas (typically in the South) where grandparents raising children is more common, partner with your local school district to distribute information through school events and staff. Make sure to include PTA meetings, school meal service directors and child nutrition professionals, school counselors, school nurses, and athletic coaches.
2. **Work With the Professionals.** Partner with your local SNAP office to train workers from key organizations such as visiting nurses and registered dietitians who are affiliated with your local county office. Educate them about the nutrition benefits of SNAP and how to apply. You may also ask them to make referrals to your organization for budgeting and/or prescreenings.
3. **Build Your Own Village.** Contact programs for foster parents and grandparents, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, and other mentoring programs to help get information out. Keep summer camps and recreation programs in mind, especially those aimed at low-income families. Area Agencies on Aging often sponsor Grandparents Raising Grandchildren programs.
4. **Stay In Step With the Seasons.** Participate in annual events such as an end-of-summer school supply drive, “Back to School Night,” fall coat giveaway, winter Angel Tree gift exchange, and spring registration for summer camps and recreation programs. Ask to distribute a one-page factsheet or to set up an information booth or table at events that parents/guardians may attend.
5. **Put It In a Backpack.** Send information home with children who receive free or reduced-price lunch. You may want to consider timing this for the beginning of the school year or at the end of grading periods as children may begin to live with a guardian mid-school year.

Addressing Barriers & Challenges

What Prevents Seniors From Enrolling in SNAP?

The majority of seniors who are potentially [eligible](#) for SNAP do not participate. There are many reasons why—for a more detailed list, review the [Ten Myths and Barriers](#). From USDA research reports (see [Resources Section](#) for complete listing) and first-hand experience, we know some of the reasons why seniors do not participate in SNAP. By each reason below, a brief talking point is provided. Consider these “mini-scripts” to help you overcome the word “No.”

Talking Points to Address Concerns About Applying for SNAP Benefits

Welfare stigma

For many in the Silent Generation, relying on “welfare” or any type of public assistance is not acceptable. This generation of “self-sacrifice” was raised to be independent and self-reliant. They don’t want to “lose face” in front of their peers.

RESPONSE

You worked hard and the taxes you paid helped to create SNAP. Now it's time to let it help you buy the healthy foods you like to eat.

Embarrassment

Seniors believe that family members and friends would view them differently and might think that they are not able to care for themselves. Plus, many seniors would be ashamed to be seen at the welfare office applying for benefits or using the EBT card at the grocery store.

RESPONSE

The local office is not always the only place you can apply for SNAP. Some local offices visit senior centers or other sites to take applications. There are other ways to apply — you can mail or fax your application, and in some places you can apply online. If you mail, fax, or submit your application online, you may request a telephone interview with the SNAP worker who is handling your application. You may also authorize a friend or relative to take your application form to the local office. This designated person can also be interviewed by the SNAP worker.

Remember: Everyone needs help now and then. Some people rely on visiting nurses or other services after an illness. There are also transportation services for seniors who can no longer drive. Plus, everyone over age 65 gets support from Medicare, and Medicaid helps people who are disabled, including seniors. Receiving SNAP benefits to buy all sorts of food such as whole grains, fruits and vegetables, and low-fat dairy products is no different.

Tips & Tools

Partnerships work.

Encourage your SNAP office to have a designated person who assists seniors with applications.

Preparation is the key to success.

Be prepared and have appropriate materials such as your business card, SNAP office locations, phone numbers and business hours, informational brochures, or SNAP application forms with you. Your goal is to present sufficient information to help people make an informed decision whether or not to apply for SNAP benefits.

Application filing.

Encourage seniors without all of the required forms to fill out the first page of the application form. This starts the application process.

Recipe for Success

“Our partnership with a tax preparation organization has been very successful with seniors. While the tax preparers are completing their taxes, they’re able to see if they might be eligible for SNAP benefits. Right then, on the spot, they help the seniors complete the application. It works very well.”

Susan Craig, SNAP, Kansas

Addressing Barriers & Challenges

Sense of Failure

Regardless of which generation they come from, older adults who have worked all their lives view needing SNAP benefits as a failure and think others feel the same way.

RESPONSE

Lots of people, young and old, are having financial difficulties, especially in this economic climate. Tough times require new solutions.

Culture

Hispanic and Asian cultures, in particular, believe that family members, not the government, should care for aging parents and grandparents.

RESPONSE

Family members can continue to help you. SNAP is a program that can add to the help you receive from your family. Receiving SNAP benefits lets you purchase all kinds of foods such as fruits and vegetables. Having those extra food dollars gives you more money to spend on other things such as medicine, utilities, activities, and personal items.

Difficulty completing an application

For many low-income seniors, difficulty can mean different things:

- Transportation may not be readily available, especially for those adults in rural areas or who have mobility issues.
- Application forms may be long and complicated. These forms may have small print, which makes them difficult to read.
- Long waits at the local SNAP office or waiting in a noisy lobby may discourage some from applying. Many seniors do not know that they can be interviewed by telephone or at other locations such as senior centers. They also are not aware that they can designate an authorized representative to take the application form to the local office. This representative can be interviewed by the SNAP worker on their behalf.
- Acronyms and jargon used by the local office worker may be difficult to understand and, as a result, the applicant might not understand what documentation must be submitted. Applicants may also be hard of hearing and may have difficulty understanding the worker.

RESPONSE

I can help you or I will call my contact at the SNAP office. (If there is a particular organization in the area that helps seniors apply, provide the contact information or offer to make a call.)



Recipe for Success

“We hold social events with ethnic communities (Jewish, Greek, Italian) with food and music. When they get there, we give them food baskets that include information on SNAP. It’s more of an indirect way of reaching them.”

Ilene Marcus, Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty, New York City



Did You Know?

Important 2008 Farm Bill Changes

The Farm Bill eliminated the cap on the dependent care deduction. For seniors paying for child care or adult care, this means they can now deduct the entire cost of the care. For example, a working senior might have to pay adult day care fees for his or her spouse in order to remain employed. Another example would be working seniors with custody of their grandchildren who require childcare services.

Saving is encouraged by excluding tax-preferred retirement accounts and education accounts. Not counting the value of these accounts will help seniors.

What Are the Benefits of Partnerships in Reaching Seniors?

Like most individuals, when seniors seek a particular service, they call or visit the appropriate agency or organization. But when they have multiple needs, as many do, they may not know where to start. Partnerships with organizations that are trusted and credible messengers, such as the local Office on Aging or places of worship, can help seniors take the first step to getting the help they need. The ability to access and choose adequate, safe, and healthy food is essential if older adults are to remain independent at home in the community. Geographic food access plays an important role in determining the quality and quantity of foods older persons are able to purchase in their neighborhoods. The organization may be able to offer a “package” of benefits because it handles multiple programs or it may make referrals to other agencies. Encourage your partners to submit a referral document or to make a phone call while the senior is with them. That way, the senior who may have hearing, transportation, or other issues will not have to initiate the contact.

Together, partnerships:

- Address community issues concerning their target audiences. This can be accomplished through a [community needs assessment](#). The assessment will also show you which organizations are like-minded and who will make the strongest partners.
- Can make referrals to SNAP offices or other community organizations or distribute informational materials.
- Provide opportunities for one-stop shopping. Being able to apply for more than one type of benefit at a time makes it easier for potential applicants to apply for SNAP.
- Provide prescreening services which can show the potential applicant an estimated amount of the SNAP benefit in terms of dollars he or she might receive.
- Provide use of facilities for outreach efforts such as distribution of materials, prescreenings, events, etc.
- Provide nutrition education counseling and educational resources that are designed to improve the consumption of healthful foods and physical activity that are age appropriate. These educational resources reinforce the importance of a nutritious diet and regular physical activity in achieving and maintaining a healthy body weight for older adults.
- Enhance coordination for planning and implementing projects or campaigns by pooling resources and minimizing duplication of efforts.



Potential Partners

- SNAP Office
- Local Office on Aging
- Local houses of worship or other faith-based organizations
- Senior recreation centers
- Hospitals and health clinics
- Home health agencies and visiting nurse programs
- Senior advocacy groups (AARP Foundation, National Council on Aging)
- Nutrition programs for seniors (congregate meal sites, home delivered meals, Meals on Wheels, Feeding America)
- USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture
- Association of State Nutrition Network Administration
- Community Action Agencies
- Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), Senior Corps programs
- Medicare/Medicaid managed care organizations
- Public housing authorities
- Volunteer groups (foster grandparents, telephone reassurance programs, etc.)
- Adult day care facilities
- Service organizations (American Red Cross, Salvation Army, Goodwill)
- Civic organizations (Lion’s Club, Rotary Club, Masons, Kiwanis, and others)
- Caregiver support groups through Area Agencies on Aging, faith-based groups, etc.
- Local libraries
- Public transportation authorities
- Labor unions
- Unemployment offices
- Grocery stores or local farmers’ markets
- Radio “Community Spotlight” programs
- Humane Society, pet rescue organizations

In conducting outreach to seniors, participation in community collaborations can:

- Ensure that this often physically and financially vulnerable population benefits from efficiencies in cost, resources, and time.
- Bring outreach efforts where seniors or their caregivers live, work, and relax.
- Improve outreach to hard-to-reach subgroups such as those who are homebound, low-literate, and non-English speakers.
- Capitalize on the trusting relationships many organizations have with their older members.

One of the most important benefits of building partnerships is that collaborators can become “ambassadors” for your agency and its programs and services. This is particularly important when working with the older seniors whom, research shows, most often rely on word-of-mouth and trusted messengers when making important decisions.

In short, partnerships and collaborative activities will allow your organization to reach more seniors in need of nutrition assistance than it ever could on its own. For more information on forming partnerships in general, see the [Partnerships section](#) of this toolkit.

How Can Partnerships Help You Reach Caregivers?

Age and the aging process cause seniors to need more support and services than at any other time in their lives. Caregivers, arguably, shoulder most of the responsibility associated with meeting that need. Since caregivers frequently have first-hand experience in helping their loved ones, the right partnerships can greatly enhance your ability to reach seniors. Caregivers are typically younger than the people they care for, may be working, and have different daily routines, lifestyles, and interests. So, the best opportunities to promote SNAP benefits to caregivers will most likely rest with the following types of organizations:

- Major local employers
- Hospitals/health clinics
- Senior advocacy groups
- Local houses of worship or area clergy groups
- Adult day care centers
- Medicaid-managed care organizations
- Caregiver support groups



Tips & Tools

Consider working with the State to develop a new outreach plan or strengthen the existing one. Check out SNAP’s [State Outreach Plan Guidance](#).

Partnership Agreement Letter Template

[DATE]
[NAME]
[TITLE]
[BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION]
[ADDRESS]
[CITY], [STATE] [ZIP CODE]

Dear Mr./Ms. [NAME]:

Millions of American seniors live alone, have difficulty providing themselves with a steady supply of food, and experience some degree of hunger. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (formerly the Food Stamp Program) is the first line of defense against this problem. In our city/county up to [X] seniors are potentially eligible to receive these nutrition assistance benefits every month.

On behalf of [ORGANIZATION NAME], I am writing to invite you to lend your support to [STATE/CITY/TOWN'S] SNAP outreach efforts to seniors by *[Describe the request — an activity you would like the organization to participate in, such as: hosting a health fair or prescreening event; volunteering; distributing informational flyers; promoting events; etc.]*.

The goal of this outreach effort is to ensure that seniors who are eligible for SNAP know about the program and are able to access benefits. Our organization is helping to promote the nutrition benefits of SNAP to seniors and their caregivers.

[Provide local information on what your organization is doing and whom you plan to target in your campaign.]

We hope you will join us in supporting [ORGANIZATION or COALITION NAME'S] outreach efforts. We would be honored to work with you. With your support, we are confident that we can reach more of [CITY/STATE'S] senior citizens not yet enrolled in SNAP. By participating *[List benefits to organization such as: reinforce position as community leader, provide opportunity for positive media exposure, offer community service opportunities, etc.]*.

I will contact you in the next few days to further discuss the vital role you can play in helping our community. In the meantime, feel free to contact me at [PHONE NUMBER] should you have any questions. I have also enclosed additional information on SNAP benefits for your review. Again, we hope you can join us in supporting this important effort, and look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

[NAME]
[TITLE]
Enclosures

Section III: Communicating Effectively With Older Adults

What Information Sources Do Seniors Trust Most?

When it comes to issues related to health or well-being, older adults place high value on the advice and opinion of the people they know. This trend increases with age, with Silent Generation seniors placing the most trust in interpersonal sources. Such sources include health care and other professionals or trained personnel, family members, faith-based organizations, and friends.

In community outreach, these sources are commonly referred to as “trusted messengers” and are excellent channels for promoting the issue of hunger and food insecurity and the availability of SNAP benefits.

The top five most frequently used sources that seniors go to for information:

1. Interpersonal sources, such as health care providers and professionals, friends, and family
2. Newspapers and magazines
3. Television
4. Radio
5. Internet

For information about social services, Silent Generation seniors tend to turn to print sources as a primary reference, specifically newspapers, magazines, and books. While there are issues with literacy among older seniors, those that do read comfortably often use their local libraries for information about general health issues.

- This age group also tends to watch more television than others, especially during the day, so that remains one of the top ways they get health information. The same is true for radio, where senior listenership to talk radio is significant.
- Although Internet use is far less frequent among low-income seniors than it is among moderate- to high-income seniors, it is a promising medium for promoting SNAP, especially to caregivers and the youngest members of the group. Keep in mind that Baby Boomers are tech savvy, having used computers in the workplace and at home. As a result, they often turn to the Internet for health information.
- Although older seniors use the Internet to a much lesser extent, when they do use it, it’s often at their local libraries. When seniors go online, the majority do so to locate general health information, although they will also seek out information through other sources. For Baby Boomers, on the other hand, the Internet is generally more trusted than traditional media.



Recipe for Success

As the Internet is becoming increasingly popular across all age groups, we encourage you to “optimize” any press releases you may distribute, in addition to doing a traditional press release. This means doing certain things that make it stand out online. For specific tips on how to optimize a press release, check out the [Media Relations](#) chapter. Does your agency have a Web page? If so, why not link to other agencies? If not, why not work with your partners to develop a Web site?

How Can I Tell if My Outreach Materials Are Appropriate for Seniors?

The good news is that older people, particularly Silent Generation seniors, are readers. In fact, they are largely responsible for keeping newspapers in business! Baby Boomers also read information on the Internet. But as people age, changes in their memory and physical condition can limit their ability to understand information. For example, seniors may have some difficulty:

- Learning information quickly, such as understanding charts and graphs or comparing pieces of information
- Reading a page that is in small print and filled with information. It is important to use large print and to keep a fair amount of white space on the page
- Remembering important information when it is mixed in with information that is not important
- Handling small documents
- Turning pages, especially on glossy or thin paper

How Do I Create Materials That Reflect the Different Cultures and Ethnicities Within the Senior Community Where I Work?

The [Cultural Competency](#) chapter addresses the importance of creating materials that are culturally and linguistically competent. The same holds true for the senior population. As a rule, materials should be tailored to reflect the cultural background of the intended audience. This can be achieved through graphics and photographs, and by creating in-language materials for non-English speakers.

Is There a Way To Test Materials To Make Sure They Appeal to Older Adults?

Yes! That's where your community partners can help. Ask your experts to review draft materials and point out problem areas.



Tips & Tools

Your community partner may be using a flier or brochure that has space for you to add your program information. Also, check with your local SNAP office and see if they have a local toll-free number or Web site, and direct people there.

How Do I Know if My Writing Is Appropriate for Seniors?

Your writing is appropriate for seniors if it:¹⁰

- **Is simple and to the point.** Use clear and familiar words. Omit unnecessary words and jargon. In other words, say what you mean. You are presenting facts to help your audience make an informed decision. Also, be sure to keep literacy levels in mind as you develop your materials. You may want to consider using an online tool to help you keep the literacy level below grade 7.
- **Uses real-life, relevant examples.** These can help the reader build on what he or she already knows about a topic.
- **Uses pictures to help present the information.** For example, pictures of a SNAP application form might be helpful to show your audience where to sign it.
- **Limits key points and action steps.** Make your message brief, with no more than five points, and use an active voice. For example, “Call to make an appointment” is better than saying, “You can make an appointment by calling.”
- **Repeats main points multiple times.** This focuses attention on what is important and will help older adults recall information. A good rule of thumb:
 - Introduce what you are going to say.
 - Say it.
 - Repeat what you said.

How Do I Know if My Graphic Design Is Appropriate?

Your graphic design is appropriate if it:¹²

- **Uses short sentences.** Short sentences are often easier for seniors to digest.
- **Avoids stereotypes.** Know your audience. Make sure pictures and graphics represent the audience you are trying to reach.
- **Is printed on standard 8-1/2” x 11” paper.** Resist printing smaller brochures or leaflets. Arthritis and other ailments often make smaller materials harder for seniors to hold and manipulate.
- **Uses simple fonts and large type.** Make sure your font is free of fancy loops. Use fonts that are easy to read such as Times New Roman and Georgia. Avoid novelty typefaces, like Bodoni or Chiller. Similarly, text is easier to read when it is at least 13- or 14-point.
- **Has plenty of white space and bold, contrasting colors.** Empty space on a page provides a natural place for eyes to rest and refocus. To older eyes, yellows, blues, and greens appear to blend in with the background when next to one another. However, some organizations use black type on yellow paper because it reduces glare.

10. National Institute on Aging. Making Your Printed Health Materials Senior Friendly, ONLINE. 2008. National Institute on Aging. Available: <http://www.nia.nih.gov/healthinformation/publications/srfriendly.htm> [25 Aug. 2009].



Writing for the Internet

Because the Internet is a trusted source of information for the largest segment of the senior population, Baby Boomers, you may want to post fliers, forms, or general information on your organization’s Web site – particularly if you want to reach caregivers. Use the tips above as a general guide, and keep these in mind especially for the Internet:¹¹

- **Main points** should be listed at the top of the Web page, so visitors don’t have to scroll down.
- **Limit paragraphs** to 30 words. This creates additional white space.
- **Use one idea per sentence** and keep sentences under 17 words.
- **Be direct.** The Web is friendly. Use “we” and “you” instead of “the applicant,” “the client,” and so forth.

11. AskOxford.com. Better Writing: One Step Ahead: Writing for the Internet, ONLINE. 2009. Oxford Dictionary. Available: <http://www.askoxford.com/betterwriting/osa/internet/?view=uk> [25 Aug. 2009].

12. National Institute on Aging. Making Your Printed Health Materials Senior Friendly, ONLINE. 2008. National Institute on Aging. Available: <http://www.nia.nih.gov/healthinformation/publications/srfriendly.htm> [25 Aug. 2009].

Event Planning for Senior Audiences

What Do I Need To Consider When Planning an Event or Activities for Seniors?

One fun way to introduce the senior community to SNAP, regardless of age, is through a planned event or activity. Health fairs, grocery stores, and senior centers may be good locations for events. Don't forget to include the caregiver audience and those who influence seniors in your promotional efforts.

Here are a few things to consider as you plan your event:

- **What type of event are you considering?** Health fair, grocery store with nutrition education providers and prescreening services, senior center, other?
- **Define audience when appropriate**, as not all events are for all seniors.
- **What is your budget?**
- **What type of equipment**, materials (grocery bags/cart filled with food), banners, etc. will you need?
- **What will your publicity be?** How will your event be announced? What media sources will you use? When will promotion begin? Will you use the Internet?
- **Whom can your organization partner with** to share costs and materials, or to provide volunteers, etc.?
- **Make sure everyone has a clear understanding of their roles** and responsibilities. Identify an event leader.
- **Make a contact list** for those who will be working on the event.
- **What time of day will you hold the event?** Rush-hour traffic, trouble seeing at night, and safety concerns may keep many seniors off the road after dusk. On the other hand, those who rely on caregivers or friends for transportation may be able to attend only after the normal workday ends or on weekends.
- **Keep the season and weather in mind** when choosing when to hold the event, and whether it will be held indoors or outside.
- **Food?** Keep in mind that many seniors have medical conditions that limit certain foods, including those high in sugar and sodium. In addition, if your budget is tight, a local restaurant or nonprofit, such as the local Diabetes or Heart Association, university, or SNAP nutrition education provider may be willing to fund the food as part of a healthy cooking demonstration.
- **Evaluation of event?** Are there any reports to complete? Make sure someone is keeping track of attendance, applications requested or completed, and other important information. Consider developing a brief survey (no more than 10 questions) to find out what people thought of the event and ways to improve it. It's the best way to know for sure if your event was a success! You can also use this sample evaluation form.



SNAP Offices and the Media

Be sure to advise your local SNAP office if you plan to host an event or conduct any media outreach. It is important that they be prepared for an increase in calls or visits. In addition, it is helpful if you provide them with a list of messages or media materials you plan to use. That way, local offices can better serve callers and/or visitors.

If possible, partner with the local SNAP office. Local offices may have materials that you can give out and may be willing to send local spokespeople or workers to the event.

Event Planning for Senior Audiences

Choosing a Location

Since it is likely that some in your audience will need assistance, you will want to consider:

- **Wheelchair accessibility.** Does your event site have ramps, elevators, and other accommodations?
- **Restrooms.** Are they nearby and available to people with problems moving around?
- **What transportation services** will be available, if any?
- **Make sure hallways are well-lit** and can accommodate wheelchairs and walkers, and that floors are free of trash or loose rugs and mats.
- **If a mobile van for health screenings,** nutrition education, or SNAP prescreenings will be there, where will it be parked, and how will waiting lines be handled?

Setting Up an Event (day of or several days before event):

- **Check in with partners.**
- **Distribute contact list.**
- **Materials:** Do you have all the materials you need, such as name tags, forms, or pencils and pens? Practical “give-away” promotional items are often popular with seniors. Items might include grocery pad magnets, key chains with mini-flashlights, and refrigerator photo frames.
- **Booth location:** Schedule a walkthrough of the location to double check details, such as placement of electrical outlets, if needed.
- **Evaluation tool:** If you have a survey to distribute, make sure you have enough copies.

Day of Event:

- Arrive early to check out booth, or to hold a quick pre-event meeting.
- Use plenty of signage and have extra volunteers on hand to help with directions and answer questions.
- People working on the event should understand roles and responsibilities, and should have a point of contact in case more help is needed or to resolve issues.
- Check equipment to make sure it is working.
- Expect surprises! No matter how well you plan, unexpected things happen.
- Consider standing a short distance away from your table to allow hesitant people to browse your information without feeling pressured. Approach them when they appear to be looking around for someone and thank them for stopping by when they move on.



Tips & Tools

For more information about how to plan a successful event, please see the [Events](#) chapter.

How Do I Promote SNAP to the Media?

The Media chapter provides proven techniques and tips for working with the media. This includes how to determine which media professionals to contact and when, as well as how to communicate your message through:

- Interviews
- Media advisories
- Press releases, both traditional and optimized
- Community calendar listings
- Public service announcements (visit www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach for ready-made PSAs)



Recipe for Success

“You can send press releases, purchase advertisement space and place your event in our community calendar, and after a while you’re sure to meet with some success. But nothing, nothing can match the impact of a great story.”

Reporter, Senior Beacon Newspaper, Washington, DC

Sample Community Calendar Listing

If you’re 60 or older, and thinking about how to make ends meet, you may qualify for extra help with food through [State’s] Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. On [date/time], the [organization] will host a free 1-hour information session at [address]. Friendly volunteers look forward to talking with you and helping you with the paperwork to apply. Call 1-800-XXX-XXXX to learn more or to RSVP. If you are interested in SNAP, ask us what papers you should bring.

How Do I Communicate Effectively With Caregivers?

A caregiver is anyone who provides help to another person in need. The person receiving care may have a condition such as dementia, cancer, or brain injury, or he or she might just need help with basic daily tasks such as:

- House cleaning and maintenance
- Grocery or other shopping
- Cooking
- Transportation
- Paying bills
- Taking medicine
- Bathing
- Dressing
- Using the toilet

Caregivers do not fit one description. They can be volunteers or paid employees with a social service or health care agency. Caregivers also can be family members who may or may not reside with the senior or friends.

Whether the caregiver is family, a friend, or a paid aide, the demands of caring for an older adult or aging parent are many, and finding where and how to get services can be frustrating.

Caregivers typically have influence on the decisions that seniors make. Chances are, seniors considering SNAP will seek the advice of a caregiver, if there is one, or a trusted friend. The type of information the caregiver will need is the same type the senior needs.



Authorized Representatives

A senior may wish to designate an authorized representative during the application process.

An authorized representative could:

- submit an application on behalf of a SNAP participant
- attend a certification interview
- do grocery shopping for SNAP participant

The authorized representative can be the same person or two different individuals.

Who Are our Nation's Caregivers?

Most Americans will be a caregiver to a family member or friend—sometimes called “informal caregivers”—at some point during their lives. Altogether, informal caregivers provide the majority of the long-term care in the United States. As you plan your outreach to caregivers, first take some time to familiarize yourself with the nature of that audience and demographic. Understanding the typical profile of a caregiver will be very useful in targeting your outreach efforts. Following are some characteristics of caregivers today:

- The majority of caregivers are women.
- Most caregivers are middle-aged, and some of them may even be struggling with their own health
- Many caregivers are Baby Boomers (aged 50-64) who are actively employed, working either full time or part time.

How Can I Influence the Influencers?

When communicating with caregivers, remember they:

- Are looking for answers and services that can help the senior.
- May be concerned about financial costs.
- May be limited on time. Most caretakers are typically short on time and are pulled in many directions. Some may be working or raising their own children.
- Are interested in the “process” of applying for SNAP benefits and how to make this process most efficient.
- Walk a fine line as they try to preserve the dignity of those in their care who may not agree with the decisions being made, especially about applying for SNAP or other public assistance. This balance cannot be overstressed.



Communicating with Caregivers about SNAP

When communicating to caregivers about SNAP, it will be important to:

- **Acknowledge the important role** of the caregiver and show understanding of the responsibility involved.
- **Stress your concern** for the senior and commitment to making the process as simple as possible.
- **Clearly lay out the eligibility rules** and guidelines. Eligibility rules for elderly and disabled persons are different.
- **Reassure the caregiver** that there are no hidden costs to the senior or responsible party, and that applying for SNAP does not require multiple appointments. Be sure to cover telephone interviews and authorized representatives.
- **Provide caregivers with examples** of how to file SNAP applications- drop off at local office, mail, fax, email in some States, or by authorized representative.
- **Refer caregivers to outreach workers** who can provide one-on-one application assistance such as filling out the form, prescreening for benefits, gathering the verification documents, or sitting in on the interview.
- **Provide examples** of how SNAP benefits can be used if the senior no longer cooks at home. Explain that the senior can authorize someone to do the grocery shopping.

Where Are the Best Places To Distribute SNAP Materials to Caregivers?

Here are a few cost-effective media outlets and “communication spots” for reaching older adults, caregivers, and other individuals with information about SNAP benefits for seniors. They are not ranked in any particular order.

- Local Area Office on Aging
- Outreach/nutrition education coalitions in local communities
- Community centers
- Senior transportation services
- Senior center activities
- Internet (ask to link to partners’ Web sites and offer them template introductory language)
- Hospitals, doctors’ offices, or health department
- Pharmacy waiting areas (consider asking pharmacies to include a SNAP message on bags or forms attached to prescription bags discussing medications)
- Faith-based groups or houses of worship
- Grocery stores or farmers’ markets
- Mall walker programs
- Free television community event postings
- Free radio public service announcements on talk radio
- Barbershops/hair salons
- Daycare centers
- School PTA meetings
- Health fairs or events
- Library kiosks, community bulletin boards and/or newsletters
- Fitness centers, especially those that offer classes tailored to people over age 40
- “Penny saver” community advertisements



Tips & Tools

Having a contact at a local SNAP office who specializes in serving seniors is a win-win situation. Explore this possibility if you are involved in developing State plans.